

## Trends in Indonesia -Malaysia Bilateral Relations in Post -Suharto Period<sup>1</sup>

Baiq L.S.W. Wardhani<sup>2</sup>

International Relations Department, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT:

The relations between Indonesia and Malaysia is best termed by ‘love and hate’ relationship. Despite having a sort of ‘familial’ bond, during more than three decades, both countries have been involved in series deeds affect the harmonious relationship they had forged in the past. However, there is a tendency that elites from both countries managed to improve relationship, which shows significant progress. Geography is something cannot be altered, thus to quit the hassle Indonesia and Malaysia have no other choice than managed the relationship as best as they might do by minimizing the emotional dimension to a more realistic one. Indonesia -Malaysia bilateral relations should now be reaching a new phase, one which produces more substance and reduces the “romantic” sense of the past.

**Key Words:** bilateral relations, ethnic stock, emotional, realistic.

Bilateral relations between Indonesia and Malaysia have been marked by ups and downs. This is not unusual, as being neighbors it reflects the dynamics of the relationship. But as the people of both countries are coined as originated from the same ethnic stock and considered themselves as blood brothers, the dynamics of the relationship worth to be examined. History has indicated that as the two countries grow as separate nations, the relationship sometimes becomes problematic. Indeed, there has been a trend since the fall of Suharto in 1998 that the relationship of both countries has faced various challenges that has often led it deteriorated to its lowest point.

The aim of this paper is to identify some problems leading to deteriorati on of the two countries relations in post -Suharto period. I argue that two significant factors have influenced the dynamics of the relationship. First, the figure of Suharto in many respect helped to stabilize the relationship, which in the process was fur ther helped by the coming into office of Mahathir who was also considerably influential in maintaining the cordial relations. This means that the fall of Suharto, and to a certain extent Mahathir’s resignation, reveals the true nature of the relationship, which has so long been kept latent from being dropped as a result of unresolved problematic conflict. In other words, the role of the strong men is especially influential in maintaining the good relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. Second, as a resul t of time passage, there is a discrepancy and changing perception between Indonesia and Malaysia over the *serumpun* concept. This emotional bond proves no longer powerful in binding the people who have grown with different needs and interests.

### From ‘Honeymoon’ to Confrontation

The relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia reached its peak dated back to the pre - independence period, where the two “blood brothers” supported each other in many ways. There are several factors facilitating the honeymoon perio d.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper has been presented for the International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (ICoSSH '08), University Sains Malaysia, in Penang, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence: Baiq L.S.W. Wardhani. Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Politic Science, Airlangga University. Jl. Airlangga 4 -6 Surabaya 60286, Indonesia. Phone: 031 -503 5675. E-mail: wardhani@unair.ac.id.

First, are the proximity factor. The two parties share many things in common: geographically, racially, culturally, religion, and language. Geographic proximity, sharing lands and borders are also factors that help to develop the strength of the relationship. The interaction among the *serumpun* (the people of the same racial or ethnic stock). People has taken place from over a thousand years ago through trade and religion. These factors are of significant in the relationship which has conditioned perceptions and expectations and it is of contemporary significance. Proximities are proved functional for some respect.

Second, Indonesian and Malayan youths shared the spirit of nationalism during the struggle of independence. Those factors contributed to the feeling of 'oneness' among Malay people both in Indonesia and Malaysia. Mackie suggests that Indonesia's quest for national independence made a powerful appeal to young Malays in Malaya in the last decade before the Second World War and in the years of Indonesia's revolutionary struggle against the Dutch between 1945-1949. Soekarno and Hatta were regarded as national heroes in Malaya as well as in Indonesia and their photos were displayed in many Malay and Bornean households some years before independence (Mackie:18).

The notion of *serumpun* proved to be useful in mobilizing anti-colonial sentiments and boosting a sense of solidarity and mutual help among the nationalist groups in both countries. For instance, there was a strong impulse from the young Malaysians and Indonesians for the growth of the idea of a closer union between Malaya and Indonesia. Some journals (such as *seruan Azhar*, *pilehan timur*) and political organizations (*jami'ah Al-Khairiyah*, *kesatuan Melayu muda*, *persatuan Melayu Selangor*, *persatuan pemuda Indonesia dan Malaya*, *persatuan Talabah Indonesia-Malaysia*, *majelis kebangsaan Indonesia-Malaya/perkumpulan pemuda Indonesia*, *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*) were established to make the bond stronger. These efforts proved powerful to unite Indonesian and Malayan youths to "unite with one heart for progress and prosperity" (Roff, 1994:88-9).

The strong desire was reflected in the goals for unification by establishing ideas including: (1) the presence of the concept "*Melayu Raya*" as being synonymous with "*Indonesia Raya*" (greater Malaysia and greater Indonesia) based on a common history linked in continuity to a glorious past. Under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaacob and Ishak Haji Mohamed, this idea was launched in 1937, formed a radical nationalist and anti-British organization; (2) linking Malaya's future with Indonesia's and to declare joint independence of the two nations; this endeavour was voiced by the *kesatuan rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (union of peninsular Indonesian: KRIS) and *persatuan pemuda Indonesia dan Malaya* (the association of Indonesia and Malay youth or perpindom) (Nasution, 1977:63); (3) proposing to stop all "alien" immigration to the then Malaya but encouraged Indonesian immigrants because 'the Indonesians come from the same ethnic stock as the Malays'. This idea was proposed in 1938 by *persatuan Melayu Selangor* (Selangor Malay association) which itself was formed in Kuala Lumpur (Aris, 1977:79); and (4) adopting the Indonesian flag, the *merah-putih*, as the PKMM's banner and voiced its support for the Malayan union.

Despite the feeling of 'oneness', the development of serious conflict, meant that the relationship was marked by a "love-hate" tendency. Generally each perceives the other in those terms and sometimes exhibits suspicion and distrust towards each other. Mackie (1977:14) asserts:

... the very mixed feelings which Indonesians and Malays have shown toward each other in the last decade - pride in their common Malay cultural heritage, yet at the same time mutual suspicions: admiration tinged with the apprehension on the Malay side, disdain spiced with both envy and contempt on the Indonesian - are a complex amalgam derived from both recent experience and folk-memories of the past which we find embodied in their myths and legends.

However, Sukarno's policy of Confrontation turned all good deeds down. Confrontation had been a bitter experience for Malaysians and to some extent is considered a betrayal of a special relationship by blood brothers across the straits. Like any other kind of special relationship which sours, unfulfilled expectations or dissatisfactions can cause deep and long - lasting ill feelings. However, before the *konfrontasi* era, although the need to stimulate the *serumpun* sentiment was no longer as important as during the anti-colonial era, the presence of the sentiment was still considerably strong among the Malays in Malaysia. It is significant that, after Malaysia was formed, Malays still celebrated the anniversary of Indonesian independence (Abdullah, 1993:145).

For Malaysia, confrontation brought about a profound change in outlook on foreign policy. Indonesia's attempt to isolate Malaysia diplomatically and to discredit it in international fora led Malaysia to follow a more vigorous foreign policy and it established many new embassies abroad. Describing the impact of the confrontation episode on Malaysian foreign policy, the Malaysian secretary for foreign affairs stated:

However confrontation by a big neighbour in 1963 provided a stimulus to foreign policy. For example, several new diplomatic missions in Africa and Asia have been established, and a foreign service recruitment accelerated. Indonesian propaganda aimed at denigrating Malaysia as a 'neo-colonial' creation far from succeeding, has been exposed and Malaysia's reputation throughout the world correspondingly enhanced (Bhattacharjee, 1977:190).

### **Suharto Period**

In the post-confrontation era, the nature of southeast Asian politics was radically changed. In the light of such changes, entering the post -confrontation period, Indonesia's relation with Malaysia took a different form from those of the previous era. According to Donald K. Emmerson, Suharto's decision to abandon Sukarno's campaign against Malaysia was rational not only because it facilitated the achievement of regional peace, but regional peace itself was a rational objective (Jackson, 1986:93). Suharto's foreign policy was seen as being subordinated to Indonesia's national development and had been confined largely to the immediate region. A major goal was improving relations with Indonesia's neighbours by terminating *konfrontasi* and signing agreements on land and sea borders with most of Indonesia's neighbours.

The second major foreign policy initiative was to engage Indonesia in a regional structure, ASEAN, in order to regain the confidence of its neighbours. The stability of the immediate region was regarded as a prerequisite for the success of Indonesia's national development efforts. The new order leaders, especially the army, also believed that regional cooperation would contribute directly to Indonesia's domestic political security and economic development since such cooperation would help create a stable and non -threatening regional environment. Indonesia's participation in regional organization would ensure that neighbouring countries remained friendly to Jakarta (Anwar, 1994:46), so that Indonesia would be safe from interference by neighbouring countries, such as was the case of *PRRI-PERMESTA*. The creation of a friendly environment meant moving the danger zone away from Indonesia's perimeter whilst the removal of immediate external threats would contribute to domestic and economic development.

The outlook of the new order under Suharto leadership had three key aspects, namely strong anti-communism, a commitment to stability and economic development, and a pragmatic international outlook. The new order leaders saw several benefits to Indonesia actively participating in regional cooperation immediately after Confrontation. Uppermost was the urgent need to restore Indonesia's credibility, both in the region and in the wider international community. Regional cooperation was firstly intended to exorcise the "ghost" of confrontation. It was not enough just to end Confrontation, this was only the beginning of a more positive and active foreign policy in the region. Indonesia needed to provide further proof that it was really

committed to a good neighbourhood foreign policy. Indonesia had to show enthusiasm for regional cooperation otherwise its sincerity towards neighbouring countries would be in doubt.

### **Post-Suharto Period**

Multidimensional crisis had forced Suharto to stepped down from the reign. Transformation had been bitter, devastating and forcing Indonesia across grave challenges. Anarchy and violence were people's daily lives' routine, even international community predicted Indonesia was about to disintegrating as a nation and would collapse soon. Indonesia's internal circumstances have influenced its behaviour internationally.

As a neighbour, Malaysia has been influenced by any development in Indonesia. There are several issues affected the two countries relationship, which for the most case is caused by blended economic, socio-cultural, political and strategic factors as a result of their proximities in many respects. Most issues are 'classical' ones, which have been there during Suharto period but getting worse after Suharto stepped down.

I try to identify some problems that lead to the decline of the relationship. These are human security issues, which are more sensitive and complicated compared to high political ones, and are lingering the two countries relationship. Some aspects of these issues have been solved but others remain.

### **Environmental Problem.**

Pollution is a now a global matter and one of disturbing problems faced by Indonesia and Malaysia, as demonstrated by Indonesia's fires. The consequence of forest fires is crossing the two nations' borders and the effect may lead to interstate tensions. The smoke has spread to neighbouring countries, not only to Malaysia but also to Singapore and Thailand, condemning that Indonesia did not take proper measures to handle the pollution. The appeal to tackle the problem produces outburst but humiliating in Indonesian side, reflecting insensitiveness and showing ignorant attitude of the government.

In fact severe haze has blanketed both countries and neighbouring areas since 1997 costing billion of dollars damage. Kuala Lumpur and other surrounding cities have suffered from unhealthy air quality caused by Indonesia forest fires. The fires are an annual occurrence, and Malaysian officials have expressed frustration over Indonesia's failure to tackle the problem. The smoke has blown over the western coast of Malaysia, shrouding its biggest city, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Cyberjaya and Port Klang (Joshi, 2005). Malaysia rushed firefighters to Indonesia during a similar crisis in 1997-1998, which caused large parts of Malaysia and Singapore to be covered by haze. A satellite images showed 587 "hot spots," or fires, in Riau and northern Sumatra in Indonesia. Seventeen hot spots were also seen in Malaysia's Sarawak state, and 16 in Indonesia's Kalimantan province, both in Borneo island (Associated Press, 2005).

Malaysia urged Indonesia to quickly ratify an agreement that would facilitate a regional response to smoky haze in Southeast Asia caused by brush fires on the sprawling archipelago. The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution was signed by all 10 members in June 2002 and it entered into force in November 2003 when most of the member countries ratified it. Indonesia is the only country that has not ratified it. The agreement resulted in the establishment of a regional coordinating center, which could react quickly to the haze caused mostly by farmers and plantation owners in Indonesia who practice slash-and-burn agricultural methods (IHT, 2006). ASEAN also demanded Indonesia to make an effort to stop the haze problem, but the plea has so far failed to get the Indonesians to respond positively. This respond produced irritation among neighbouring countries, calling Indonesia irresponsible and being a 'bad boy' in ASEAN. This appeal should, in fact be responded well to avoid any further damage into the relationship of Indonesia and Malaysia as well as with other neighbouring countries.

### **Border Problems**

The border problems have been there since Suharto was in power and they have worsened recently. Some border problems listed between Indonesia and Malaysia are to include maritime borders and disputed islands of Sipadan and Ligitan and Ambalat block.

The conflict over maritime borders between Indonesia and Malaysia occurred as a result of lack of agreement by some of the major maritime powers over the UN conference on the law of the sea in May 1982. Indonesia and Malaysia (and Singapore) were the states immediately concerned with the status of the Straits of Malacca; however, these countries had different views on this subject. As an archipelagic state, Indonesia regarded the straits as internal waters where its sovereignty was supreme and free passage a concession (Indorf, 1984:20). Malaysia, on the other hand, was more concerned with navigational safety and marine pollution, but concedes the right of innocent passage through territorial waters. To solve the differences, the two governments signed a treaty of friendship and delimitation of territorial seas treaty regarding the straits of Malacca in 1970. Indonesia had declared a 12 -mile territorial sea limit in 1957 which became law in 1960. Malaysia had already done the same thing in 1969. As the result of these declarations, the straits of Malacca of less than 24 miles was made a territorial sea of Indonesia and Malaysia.

On the national unity issue, Indonesia guaranteed Malaysia that the application of the Indonesian archipelagic principles in the south China sea would not affect Malaysian national unity and political stability, especially between west Malaysia (Malayan Peninsula) and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). This guarantee was already formulated and incorporated in the law of the sea convention.

The conflict over Sipadan and Ligitan islands (which are located in the Straits of Sulawesi, between Sabah and East Kalimantan) has recently become a sensitive issue in the relationship between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. Documents confirming who owns the islands are not clear on the point. Both Indonesia and Malaysia claim ownership because each holds different versions of the maps inherited from the colonial powers. Indonesia holds the Dutch -version and Malaysia holds the British-version maps. The islands then become an overlapping zone on the two countries boundaries. Indonesia adopts “the natural line of astronomical reflection” ( *garis petunjuk alam pantulan astronomi* ) whereas Malaysia adopts “the river indication” ( *petunjuk aliran sungai* ) (departemen kelautan dan perikanan, 2002). In this regard, Indonesia has claimed that the current of the river has changed and shifted thereby entering Indonesian territory. The ownership of these islands was discussed in the talks about the determination of the continental shelf boundary ( *batas landas kontinen* ) between Indonesia and Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur in 1969. However, there was no written agreement reached, and thus the two countries decided that the islands be given the “status quo” position which means that legal position of the islands is not to be tinkered with by both countries while trying to solve the problem with the brotherhood spirit (Asnawi, 2002).

The problem becomes more sensitive and critical when a report said that the state of Sabah has developed the disputed island of Sipadan as a tourist resort. Indonesia argues that tourism activities on Sipadan island indicate that Malaysia does not respect of the *status quo* position of the island. Indonesia has warned Malaysia not to continue any further development in the Sipadan and Ligitan islands because of their *status quo* position. By developing Sipadan and Ligitan islands, Malaysia has changed the position of the islands from the *status quo* to a *fait accompli* situation. In 1997 both countries decided to submit the case to the international court of justice (ICJ). The international court of justice has decided that Malaysia shall have the sovereignty over pulau Sipadan and pulau Ligitan in 2002 ( [www.indonesianembassy.org.nz](http://www.indonesianembassy.org.nz) , 2002).

It was not surprising that there was a sense of disappointment among Indonesian over the ICJ’s final decision. Indonesians took the case as humiliating, a serious problem of dignity. The final decision was announced when Indonesia were still struggling to rectify its pride during the challenging period of transitions. Whatever the result was, the ICJ’s decision reflects the maturity of the relationship. Efforts to resolve the Sipadan-Ligitan dispute through the ICJ is the first case

within ASEAN and in the region. It sets a precedent and serves as an example for future interactions among the countries in the region. It strengthens the importance of the use of peaceful means in settling territorial or any other disputes in the southeast Asian region (www.indonesianembassy.org.nz, 2002).

The latest territorial dispute occurred in February-March 2005 over the Ambalat offshore area located between Sulawesi and Kalimantan. Not only the territorial, the issue also related to the problem of energy security. The dispute emerged as a result of the issuing of exploration licenses for two deep-water oil concession blocks, ND6 and ND7, by Malaysia's national oil company *Petronas* to its own exploration arm, *Petronas Carigali*, in partnership with international oil giant royal Dutch/shell group in 16 February 2005. The Malaysian blocks largely overlap with that of Indonesian blocks, which were licensed to Italian oil major ENI and US-based oil multinational Unocal, in December 2004.

Indonesia responded to the dispute emotionally, characterized by anti-Malaysian street protests, flag-burnings and provocative nationalist commentary in the media. The two governments were involved in the pseudo-war like situation. As diplomatic relations soured, both sides rushed to deploy military forces to the disputed area. Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ordered the military (*tentara nasional Indonesia-TNI*) to protect Indonesian sovereignty and secure the disputed area, and it was announced that three Indonesian naval vessels were already patrolling the disputed zone. Royal Malaysian navy (RMN) and marine police vessels were reportedly deployed to the disputed area, and on March 4 the Malaysian media announced that the royal Malaysian air force (RMAF) had reinforced its units based in Sabah and Sarawak. (<http://wordpress.com>, 2007). However, the two countries decided to solve the problem peacefully through diplomatic channels.

Although some of territorial problems have been resolved, the problems remind both countries that they cannot just take the relationship for granted just because Indonesia and Malaysia are neighbours. Both need to develop more mature and realistic stand in managing the relationship.

### **Illegal Workers/Immigrants**

Another issue that disturbs the Indonesia-Malaysia relations are illegal workers/illegal immigrants. The problem has been one of the most sensitive issues over the years and becoming more sensitive in the post-Suharto era. The economic crisis has been one of the most prominent factors that encouraged the unwelcome guests from Indonesia.

Historically, migration between the two countries was common and enshrined in Malay myths and legends. However, since the post-independence era, immigration from Indonesia, as well as from other countries, has been restricted by the Malaysian Government. Malaysia's similarity in cultural heritage, language and religion has further encouraged migration. The relatively close distance between Indonesia and Malaysia is another encouraging factor. Illegal immigrants without proper documents, when caught are deported but usually find it relatively easy to slip back to Malaysia.

In the early years of their presence, the immigrants were "silently welcomed" by the ethnic Malays from the main component of the *bumiputra*; the immigrants were perceived as *bangsa serumpun* who would eventually assimilate with the local *bumiputra* (Abdullah, 1983:185). Nonetheless, the influx of Indonesians is suspected by non-Malays as an attempt by the Malay-dominated government to increase the demographic strength of the Malays and with it, political strength. Because Indonesia and Malaysia are culturally and socially similar, Indonesians can be easily assimilated into Malay society as in the case of earlier Indonesian immigrants.

Based on the amount and type of labour needed by Malaysia, the Indonesian Manpower Ministry would recruit workers and facilitate their entry into Malaysia by providing them with proper documents and exempting them from exit taxes. By this, both countries hoped not only to curb illegal immigrants but also to keep track of immigrant workers and protect them against

exploitation by Malaysian employers. Nevertheless, this agreement has not stopped the influx of illegal entries. The biggest stumbling block to this scheme is found in Jakarta which imposes an exit tax on all Indonesians leaving the country; this discourages workers from seeking work in Malaysia through official channels. The unwelcome guests add to the present sensitivity in the Indonesia-Malaysia relationship.

Despite the 'classical' problems, there are other recent issues that heat Indonesia - Malaysia relations. One of the problems is cultural claim of transborder art. Indonesia has protested against Malaysia using *barongan* which is resembled to Indonesian *reog* as Malaysian tourism promotion. Other cultural conflict includes the claim of *rasa sayange* song, *batik* art, *angklung* musical instrument, and some other cultural heritage. Each party argues that they inherit the culture from the ancestors and it has been become the part of each country's art for a long time ago. Another anti-Malaysia protest spread up in many cities in Indonesia, after a karate coach from Indonesia Donald PL Colopita was hit by Malaysian police. Besides that, other criminal activities such as illegal fishing, illegal logging, people smuggling and harassment against migrant workers are common/regular issues that disturb the relationship between Indonesia-Malaysia neighbourhood.

### **Heading the future**

The deterioration in the relationship is influenced also by the role of strong men, which is no longer present in Indonesia. In the past, the two countries relations were 'rescued' by the role of Suharto and Mahathir. The figure Suharto and Mahathir to a great extent was very powerful in determining the 'colours' of the two countries' relationship. Both Suharto and Mahathir dominated the politics and both were known as the most respectable politicians in southeast Asia. In particular, as a senior leader, Suharto's influence was far beyond his country. His personal capacity as a president of the largest country in Southeast Asia had brought him into a powerful position among other leaders in the region.

It is a fact that since post-Soeharto and post-Mahathir governments, the relationship has been marked by the ongoing 'classical' unresolved problems and emerging new unexpected problems which worsen the relationship or which have never occurred before. It is true that in the past the strong character of Suharto and Tun Abdul Razak, influenced by their 'third -worldism' perspectives, had made the relationship sour, but it was only on certain high political issues in seeking leading role in the world stage such as the rivalry in non -aligned movement, organization of Islamic countries, and ASEAN. Such a high political issue did not affect people -to-people relationship, unlike the present days where the relationship is approaching to a point of crisis.

In the future both Indonesia and Malaysia can no longer depend on a certain figure to maintain the relationship. Both countries certainly need good leaders to make good decisions and to produce good neighbourly circumstances, but more importantly, from the perspective of weak states like Indonesia, both need strong governments and strong states to protect their citizens and defend their national interests.

History and geopolitics have brought Indonesia and Malaysia to the present state of their relationship. The formal relationship which has been forged since the two countries became independent is now developing into more complex ways just as the emotional aspects are having a much deeper involvement. Indonesia -Malaysia relationship easily collapses to hostility because the relationship has been driven by unrealistic and emotional and sometimes irrational reasons, based on 'special relations' that has a root in historical bond. The history has a significant role and gives shape to the present relationship. In order to understand the nature of post -colonial relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia, one must grasp the past. The fact that the countries now have their own interests, the two still regarding each other as 'brother'. This feeling has the role to form the foundation of the relationship.

From the perceptual point of view, Malaysia, which in general considers Indonesia as its 'big brother', hides a feeling of fear that it might be dominated, if not threatened, as an older

sibling sometimes does to a younger one. As far as this family relationship is concerned, there is a strong desire that the bond is encouraged to be a more rational, a business-like relationship. If this kind of relationship is to be achieved, both countries need to look for a new approach for managing future relations.

Indonesia and Malaysia have developed as independent and sovereign states and adopted different policies and strategies to achieve their national goals. The specific conditions of the two countries have highlighted the differences in many ways; one important difference is the changing perceptions of the *serumpun* concept. This concept is in fact invoking that the two countries should live harmoniously as brothers, or at least when problems occur it would automatically fade away. In reality this way of thinking is only illusionary, it will never happen in the real life.

There has been a recent development which shows the dissimilarity in each nation's perception toward the *serumpun* concept. The generation gap is the common determining factor which contributes to the difference and is complicated by the recent economic, social, and political realities which currently prevail in both countries. The previous generation emphasised the similarities between them based on emotions and abstract notions such as ethnicity, language, religion, culture and history. These notions served intended purposes from time to time (pre and during world war) by the older generation, but such abstract notions seems to be less relevant for the younger generation. This is partly because there is less historical orientation among them, of the lack of meaningful interaction between counterparts and the lack of relevant knowledge and interest in each other's country.

The *serumpun* approach, in fact, has been an indication of unhealthy relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. The adoption of such an approach in the two countries' relationship as a model of diplomacy has aggravated the dissatisfaction in the relationship. This suggests that the problems which have occurred between them have never been completely solved on the basis of candid attitudes and discussions.

In the future, the relationship can no longer depend on the emotional tie, hence it needs a more rational approach. Confidence-building, which is lack between the two nations need to be strongly laid. Both countries are close neighbours and geographically this will not be changed. Both nations are economically, politically and strategically need each other and therefore both have no choice other than to maintain and improve the quality of the relationship.

## Conclusion

Indonesian political relations with Malaysia may be called a commonality of family relationships. Relations between Malaysia and Indonesia have been very special. This implies that on the one hand, these relations show intimacy, but, on the other hand they disguise many complex problems which are difficult to solve.

The fact that the same ethnic stock and other similarities exist between the people of both countries does not always bestow advantages on the development of the relationship. This is because the 'emotional' dimension is often involved and this has a deep influence on the relationship, and sometimes it becomes a 'barrier' to a valuable and effective partnership.

Indonesia's relations with Malaysia conceal an anxiety emerging from actual and perceptual factors. In reality, the existence of the unresolved problems between them makes this relationship to appear very clumsy. Even though in general the two countries have been able to settle their border disputes, some problems which have not been solved, can hopefully be settled appropriately. These problems continue to generate a certain hidden reluctance between the two countries. This feeling is based on the belief that they are one of family, of one stock and should be able to settle all problems in a favorable way. But the failure to resolve the status of the Sipadan and Ligitan islands, however, which in some circles is considered futile and should not shake the foundation of Indonesian-Malaysian friendship, demonstrates the "awardness" in settling this problem which presumably is supported by the principle of commonality.



If the two countries seriously want a more valuable relationship, a new form is then needed so that the positive aspects can be maximized and the negative sides minimized. Indonesia-Malaysia bilateral relations should now be reaching a new phase, one which produces more substance and reduces the “romantic” sense of the past. The two countries should learn and realize that the *serumpun* factor has both positive and negative aspects. To a certain degree, this element is still relevant and if they want to use it as a unifying force, both countries could creatively manage to produce a constructive relationship.

## References

- Abdullah, F. (1983) The *Rumpun* Concept in Malaysia-Indonesia Relations. *The Indonesian Quarterly*. 21(2):185.
- Anwar, D.F. (1994) *Indonesia in ASEAN: Foreign Policy and Regionalism* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Asnawi, S. (2002) *Sipadan-Ligitan Bukan Sekedar Sengketa Teritori*. [ Accessed 19 May 2008]. <http://www.sinarharapan.co.id/berita/0212/17/sh03.html>.
- Aris, O.M. (1977) *Ethnic Identity in a Malay Community in Malaysia*. Urbana, IL: Common Ground.
- Associated Press (2005) *Indonesian forest fires again cause haze in Malaysia*. [Accessed 16 May 2008]. <http://news.mongabay.com/2005/0804-ap.html>.
- Bhattacharjee, G.P. (1977) *Southeast Asian Politics: Malaysia and Indonesia* Columbia, Southeast Asian Books.
- Departemen Kelautan dan Perikanan RI (2002) *Tanggapan dan Masukan atas Keputusan ICJ tentang Pulau Sipadan dan Ligitan menjadi Milik Malaysia tanggal 17 Desember 2002*. [Accessed 16 May 2008]. <http://www.dkp.go.id/content.php?c=47>
- IHT, 2006. *Malaysia urges Indonesia to ratify cross-border haze pact*. [http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/08/asia/AS\\_GEN\\_Malaysia\\_Haze.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/08/asia/AS_GEN_Malaysia_Haze.php).
- Indonesian Embassy (2002) *Press Statement Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia: Following the Decision by the International Court of Justice on the Sipadan-Ligitan Case*. [Accessed 16 May 2008]. <http://www.indonesianembassy.org.nz/PressRelease737-04-xii-2002.htm>.
- Joshi, V. (2005) *Malaysia haze prompts state of emergency*. [Accessed 16 May 2008]. <http://news.mongabay.com/2005/0804-ap.html>.
- Mackie, J.A.C. (1977) *Konfrontasi: The Malaysia-Indonesian Dispute 1963-1966*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nasution, A.H. (1977) *Sekitar Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia*. Bandung: Penerbit Angkasa.
- Roff, W.R. (1994) *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Ambalat dan Konflik Energy Security* (2007) [Accessed 15 May 2008] <http://geopolitikenergi.wordpress.com/2007/04/12/ambalat-dan-konflik-energy-security/3/>.